

PALAEOGRAPHY AND SCRIBAL PRACTICES IN SYRO-PALESTINE AND ANATOLIA IN THE LATE BRONZE AGE

PAPERS READ AT A SYMPOSIUM IN LEIDEN,
17-18 DECEMBER 2009

edited by

ELENA DEVECCHI



NEDERLANDS INSTITUUT VOOR HET NABIJE OOSTEN
LEIDEN
2012

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ASSYRO-MITTANIAN OR MIDDLE ASSYRIAN?

*Mark Weeden*¹

1. INTRODUCTION

It seems premature to compare the palaeographies of different scribal cultures when individual palaeographies of the cuneiform world are so far from being established.² Furthermore, as specialists in different cuneiform disciplines it can be a daunting task to look into the world of one's neighbours and make comments about it. The risk of error is extremely great. The topic under consideration requires just such comparative adventure, but is able to build on very thorough previous work.³

The term 'Assyro-Mittanian' was first used by G. Wilhelm to describe the ductus and sign-forms of a small number of tablets found at Boğazköy and published in hand-copy by himself in KBo 36.⁴ The reason for the provisional choice of this phrase was that these tablets showed a ductus and sign-forms that had similarities with the ductus and sign-forms of Mittanian scribes, as well as with those of Middle Assyrian scribes, while being separate from both.⁵

Here I keep the terms 'ductus' and 'sign-forms' separate, the ductus referring to such matters as the manner of impressing the signs on the clay, whether deep or light impressions, the sharpness of the stylus used, as inferable from the impressions left by it, the size of the signs, especially the length of the leading uprights, the closeness of the script and other issues peripheral to the shape and structure of the sign itself.⁶ That it is virtually impossible to make extended and particular statements about the ductus of a tablet without seeing it in the flesh, must be self-evident. Only the broadest statements about the general shape of a tablet or the crowdedness of the script, for example, can be made on the basis of photographs. The word 'ductus' is also frequently used in Hittitology as a term to describe the whole overall combination of sign-forms as they appear on a particular tablet, although it is rare that this is described in concrete terms, i.e. using percentages.

¹ mw41@soas.ac.uk; School of Oriental and African Studies, London. Thanks to E. Devecchi, D. Schwemer and G. Wilhelm for their help with issues relating to this article.

² For growing uncertainties with regard to the older stages of Hittite palaeography see van den Hout 2009 and his contribution in this volume. Cuneiform palaeography is still much in its infancy outside of Hittite studies: for Amarna see Wilhelm 1984; for Old Babylonian Sumerian texts (from Nippur) see Mittermayer 2006; for a portion of Neo-Assyrian there is now the PhD dissertation of G. van Buylaere (van Buylaere 2009). Further see the comments of van Koppen and Radner apud Bietak et alii 2009: 117, and the web-site of the Birmingham Cuneiform Palaeography Project: www.cdp.bham.ac.uk.

³ Wilhelm 1992; id. 1994: 6-9; Schwemer 1998: 8-39.

⁴ Wilhelm 1991a: IV-VI. KBo 36.11, KBo 36.28, KBo 36.29, KBo 36.34.

⁵ Wilhelm 1992: 88.

⁶ Th. van den Hout points out to me that this use of the word ductus is very different to the way it is used by Mediaevalists, who use the term to refer to the order of strokes used to construct a letter.